March 21, 2007: Everett Address to American Institute of Engineers UAV Conference

Rep. Terry Everett

American Institute of Engineers' UAV Conference

UAVs: A Congressional Perspective

March 21, 2007

Good morning. I'd first like to thank the American Institute of Engineers, the Naval Aviation Foundation, Technology Training Corporation, and the National Military Intelligence Association for giving me a chance to come back and speak to all of you on an issue that is very important to me and important to our national security - unmanned aerial systems, or UAS. In the past, many of us referred to them as UAVs, however this ignores many of the essential components which create an effective UAS.

Although control of Congress has changed, UAS are still supported across the political spectrum. This support is due in large part to a strong desire for these assets we constantly hear about coming out of the warfighting theatre.

Facing a new combat environment, our military has come to rely heavily on this emerging technology, involving communications, reconnaissance, intelligence and guidance. Many combatant commanders have told me that UAS have become irreplaceable on the battlefield. The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review, DoD's comprehensive examination of our national defense strategy, echoed this sentiment when it validated the importance of UAS and established a plan to significantly expand investment in unmanned systems and their use in military operations.

Industry, in an attempt to respond directly to the warfighter's demand for this capability, has produced a wide variety and great number of systems. In 2005, UAS flew over 100,000 hours in support of Global War on Terror operations. This is double the number of flying hours in 2004, and four times the number of hours flown in 2003. The results have produced more than 3,000 aircraft, about 2,000 of which are supporting ongoing operations in Iraq.

They range from micro air vehicles, which weigh less than 13 pounds and are small enough to fit in a soldiers backpack, to the over 26,000 pound, 116-foot-wide Global Hawk. This is just one of the reasons why DoD has been challenged in establishing a strategic plan for the way forward on UAS.

In an attempt to coordinate the activities of the services in this area, the Pentagon classifies these systems into three categories: small, tactical, and theater -- also known as strategic. These different classes have different requirements, which are validated using the Joint Capabilities Integration Development System or JCIDS and approved by the Joint Requirements Oversight Council, chaired by the Vice-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and made up of the vice-chiefs of staff of the individual services.

Small UAS are operated mostly by Army soldiers and Marines primarily for force protection and situational awareness. They provide the individual soldier direct control over an asset that can provide a company commander three-dimensional situational awareness. This increased situational awareness will allow a company commander to inspect a road for IEDs, or receive battle damage assessment. Despite receiving only one percent of the UAS budget, approximately 90 percent of the total UAS inventory are small UAS.

Tactical UAS, like Shadow and the Army's new Warrior, provide direct support to a brigade commander in a variety of ways, to include lasing a target for a Joint Directed Attack Munition, or J-DAM, direct combat strike, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, or ISR missions.

Theater or strategic UAS, like the Air Force's Global Hawk, bring the greatest amount of ISR to the fight.

Because they are so few in number, these assets are reserved for the highest priority missions, as determined by the Combatant Commander.

These systems perform a wide range of missions for an equally wide variety of users, ranging from an Army company commander all the way up to the CENTCOM commander. As you might imagine, this has posed a significant management challenge for the Pentagon.

One suggestion that has been made is to designate a single service as the Executive Agent for unmanned systems that fly above a certain altitude. In fact, such a proposal was made earlier this month by the Air Force Chief of Staff, in calling for the Air Force to become the Executive Agent for all UAS flying over 3,500 feet. This poses a number of concerns.

First, we need to look at exactly what is meant by executive agency.

This designation would allow the Air Force to oversee the development, acquisition, training, and sustainability for all UAS that fly above 3,500 feet, both tactical and strategic.

Naturally, the focus of Air Force programs and missions are strategic, while the Army naturally emphasizes tactical ground combat operations. Army UAS fly different flight profiles than more strategic Air Force UAS, at different altitudes, with different sensor payloads, for shorter durations. In addition, the Army requires quicker response times for its tactical UAS missions while the Air Force has a longer turn-around time. Perhaps most importantly, if the Air Force becomes the Executive Agent for all UAS above 3,500 feet, tactical UAS requirements could become a lower priority to the Air Force's theater and strategic-oriented requirements.

This designation could have negative effects in Iraq where the Army can provide organic support of UAS to its combat troops.

This capability increases mission effectiveness, reduces the burden on combat soldiers and ensures the availability of a critical asset to warfighters when and where they need it. In fact, the Army has trained over 6,000 enlisted UAS operators to perform mission critical tasks, such as counter-IED and mobility operations. This has allowed the Army to conduct nearly 80% of the current UAS operations in Operation Iraqi Freedom. It does so with less then 20% of the DoD's UAS budget.

It seems to me that we should be working towards a strategy of inclusion rather than exclusion. For example, the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Special Operations Command are working together and interchanging UAS training, logistics, and systems development. Furthermore, the designation of one service as an executive agent could have the detrimental effect of subverting the requirements of one service to that of another.

Drawing a line at 3500 feet lacks operational merit, given the fact that multiple services have validated requirements for UAS that fly above this suggested line of demarcation. The procedures, technology, and training currently exist within all the services to allow each of them to operate both, above and below, 3,500 feet.

It was for these reasons that I opposed an executive agency designation two years ago when the Air Force proposed it, and instead supported the creation of the Joint Center of Excellence that is focused on the requirements of all the services. The overarching mission for this joint center should be the development and incorporation of each Services' unmanned system requirements and doctrine into the overall DoD mission. This will allow increased coordination and collaboration between the services, while allowing individual services to establish service-specific Centers to focus on particular capabilities. I was pleased when the Army stood up its Center of Excellence at the Aviation Center at Fort Rucker, Alabama.

As the Army proponent for UAS, Fort Rucker was the logical choice to host this newly created organization. The center focuses on the development and operational employment of UAS by tying together current operations with emerging doctrine, technologies, and future requirements. In addition, Fort Rucker is integrating all of the Army's UAS activities together into a cohesive team, in support of DoD's UAS requirements.

The work being done at the Army Center of Excellence has already begun to produce results. Last year, the Army chief of staff called for a mix analysis of its UAS programs to correspond better with future joint-force requirements and budget constraints. Based in large part on the work done at the Army Center of Excellence, they decided to continue to improve Raven and Shadow UAS, field the Warrior, and only develop two of four classes of Future Combat Systems UAS.

I am not here as a cheerleader for the Army, but it is clear to me that having one service dictate requirements for another on how they employ UAS will undermine the effectiveness that these systems bring to the battlefield.

For example, the Air Force has been crucial in supplying high quality intelligence of Army and Marine Corps raids on suspected terrorist locations in Iraq with its Global Hawk.

While Global Hawk may not be ready for prime time yet, its performance in both Iraq and Afghanistan has been encouraging. Whether the Global Hawk is patrolling Iraq's border with Syria and Iran or finding mounds alongside potential routes for conveys indicating there might be IEDs buried there, Global Hawk is proving its value as a strategic asset.

The current sensor package offers intelligence analysts imagery from electro-optical/infrared (EO/IR), synthetic aperture radar, or SAR sensors. The EO/IR suite allows analysts to distinguish people from animals, and classify the size of vehicles, during the day or at night. The SAR sensors can overcome the weather challenges by peering through clouds and producing crucial intelligence for Army soldiers and marines performing raids on the ground.

In addition to proving its military value at present, Global Hawk also looks to have a promising future. In 2011, Global Hawk is scheduled to be outfitted with a ground, moving target indicator (GMTI) sensor. This capability has been long sought after by the warfighter, and is being pursued along a parallel track in the Space Radar program.

In addition, in 2012, the platform is scheduled to carry a signals intelligence suite. In the meantime, Global Hawk is cross-cueing with other intelligence assets; an effort that has been called ground breaking by many in the Air Force.

However, as I mentioned, this capability isn't scheduled to come online until 2012. Despite this fact the DoD budget request has once again sought to retire the U-2, just as they did last year. Having worked on the program during my time in the Air Force, I know first hand of the risk to the warfighter should he lose the unique signals intelligence capabilities of the U-2 due to a premature retirement before the Global Hawk is operational. So, last year, I inserted language into both the Defense Authorization bill and the Intelligence Authorization Act, that would prohibit the Secretary of Defense from retiring these aircraft until he could certify that there would be no loss of I-S-R capability.

In conclusion, I would again like to thank American Institute of Engineers, the Naval Aviation Foundation, Technology Training Corporation, and the National Military Intelligence Association for asking me to speak to you today.

UAS are here to stay so we need to manage requirements, acquisition strategies and budgets to give our warfighters the tools they need to fight and win the global war on terror. I look forward to working with many of you to ensure that together, to improve these systems and operations for the warfighter.